

## Handout for *Writing for the Web* Training

OPA Office of Web Communications

February 2006

For links to

- resources for writing well on the Web, including the training schedule, and
  - examples covered in this presentation of good writing for the Web within epa.gov
- visit <http://epa.gov/productreview/writing/resources.html>

### **Why bother to make a special effort to write differently for the Web?**

- Get your message across quickly; Web audiences scan and click, not read.
- Reduce time spent explaining, answering phone calls, and processing controlled correspondence.
- Be more believable.
- Improve compliance with environmental regulations.

### **Step 1: Identify your most critical audiences**

- On primary and secondary pages, write to the common level (8<sup>th</sup> grade).

### **Step 2: Spend time figuring out what they will want to know**

- How can you present them?
- How will your program make a difference in their lives?

### **Step 3: Write with your audience in mind**

- Explain how you are affecting them.
- Avoid starting a heading or a sentence with "EPA..."
- Use the **inverse pyramid**: conclusions first, background second.

### **Words**

- Keep them short.
- Use as few as possible.
- Use plain language.
- Minimize jargon.
- Explain **acronyms** the first time they appear on a page.

### **Sentences**

Keep them short: no more than about 20 words.

**Links** - Viewers need to understand before they click on a link:

- Type of file.
- Type of content.
- Precise subject of information they will see.

### **Use captions and alt text to make images:**

- Understandable.
- Relate to the surrounding text.
- Accessible to people with disabilities (note: this is required by law).

### **Paragraphs**

- Keep them short: 40-70 words. Don't repeat yourself.
- Bulletize, bulletize, bulletize. Make text easy to scan.
- Consider using tables to present complex information.

### **Pages**

- Create tables of content – use name anchors.
- Write great headings.
  - No more than eight words.
  - Include keywords.
  - Cut out ~~the~~ little words.
  - Don't be cute.
  - No blue text, no underlined text.
- Use appropriate heading size and use HTML heading tags.
- Spell-check, check grammar.

### **Seven Secrets of Creating Great Links**

1. Make your link text meaningful.
  - should match the destination page.
  - should be content-rich.
2. Don't make the link text too short – 7-12 words.
3. Consider providing the URL next to or as part of the link text.
4. Don't bury your links.
5. Use blue text and underlined text only for links.
6. Don't link to organizations' home pages.
7. Don't have seven secrets if there are only six.